



LEADERSHIP  
WISDOM OF A  
BATTLE-HARDENED  
MAVERICK

# THE RUMSFELD WAY

"The Pentagon's answer to  
Harry Truman."

—U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT

JEFFREY A. KRAMES

AUTHOR OF THE JACK WELCH LEXICON OF LEADERSHIP

*The best a statesman can do  
is to listen to the footsteps of God,  
get ahold of the hem of his cloak,  
and walk with him a few steps of the way.*

—OTTO VON BISMARCK

*This page intentionally left blank.*

# THE RUMSFELD WAY



*This page intentionally left blank.*

# THE RUMSFELD WAY

*Leadership Wisdom  
of a Battle-Hardened  
Maverick*

JEFFREY A. KRAMES



**McGraw-Hill**

New York Chicago San Francisco Lisbon  
London Madrid Mexico City Milan New Delhi  
San Juan Seoul Singapore Sydney Toronto





Copyright © 2002 by The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc. All rights reserved. Manufactured in the United States of America. Except as permitted under the United States Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

0-07-141591-2

The material in this eBook also appears in the print version of this title: 0-07-140641-7.

All trademarks are trademarks of their respective owners. Rather than put a trademark symbol after every occurrence of a trademarked name, we use names in an editorial fashion only, and to the benefit of the trademark owner, with no intention of infringement of the trademark. Where such designations appear in this book, they have been printed with initial caps.

McGraw-Hill eBooks are available at special quantity discounts to use as premiums and sales promotions, or for use in corporate training programs. For more information, please contact George Hoare, Special Sales, at [george\\_hoare@mcgraw-hill.com](mailto:george_hoare@mcgraw-hill.com) or (212) 904-4069.

## TERMS OF USE

This is a copyrighted work and The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc. ("McGraw-Hill") and its licensors reserve all rights in and to the work. Use of this work is subject to these terms. Except as permitted under the Copyright Act of 1976 and the right to store and retrieve one copy of the work, you may not decompile, disassemble, reverse engineer, reproduce, modify, create derivative works based upon, transmit, distribute, disseminate, sell, publish or sublicense the work or any part of it without McGraw-Hill's prior consent. You may use the work for your own non-commercial and personal use; any other use of the work is strictly prohibited. Your right to use the work may be terminated if you fail to comply with these terms.

THE WORK IS PROVIDED "AS IS". MCGRAW-HILL AND ITS LICENSORS MAKE NO GUARANTEES OR WARRANTIES AS TO THE ACCURACY, ADEQUACY OR COMPLETENESS OF OR RESULTS TO BE OBTAINED FROM USING THE WORK, INCLUDING ANY INFORMATION THAT CAN BE ACCESSED THROUGH THE WORK VIA HYPERLINK OR OTHERWISE, AND EXPRESSLY DISCLAIM ANY WARRANTY, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO IMPLIED WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE. McGraw-Hill and its licensors do not warrant or guarantee that the functions contained in the work will meet your requirements or that its operation will be uninterrupted or error free. Neither McGraw-Hill nor its licensors shall be liable to you or anyone else for any inaccuracy, error or omission, regardless of cause, in the work or for any damages resulting therefrom. McGraw-Hill has no responsibility for the content of any information accessed through the work. Under no circumstances shall McGraw-Hill and/or its licensors be liable for any indirect, incidental, special, punitive, consequential or similar damages that result from the use of or inability to use the work, even if any of them has been advised of the possibility of such damages. This limitation of liability shall apply to any claim or cause whatsoever whether such claim or cause arises in contract, tort or otherwise.

DOI: 10.1036/0071406417



# Professional



## Want to learn more?

We hope you enjoy this  
McGraw-Hill eBook! If

you'd like more information about this book,  
its author, or related books and websites,  
please [click here](#).



*To Nancy,  
for her significant contributions to this work,  
and for her far more profound  
contributions  
to my life*

*This page intentionally left blank.*



For more information about this book, [click here](#).

## **C O N T E N T S**

RUMSFELD'S RETURN 1

### **PART I**

#### **EVOLUTION OF A STATESMAN 5**

CH. 1	The Road to Kandahar .....	7
CH. 2	Rumsfeld: Who and Why? .....	19

### **PART II**

#### **LESSONS FROM A HARD-CHARGING CEO 51**

CH. 3	Mission First .....	53
CH. 4	Straight Talk .....	65
CH. 5	All the Right Moves .....	79
CH. 6	Crafting Coalitions .....	93
CH. 7	The Consequence of Values .....	109
CH. 8	The War CEO .....	121
CH. 9	Acquiring and Using Intelligence .....	137
CH. 10	Mastering the Agenda .....	151
CH. 11	The Pragmatic Leader .....	165
CH. 12	The Determined Warrior .....	181

THE "AXIS OF EVIL" 197

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 205

SOURCES AND NOTES 209

INDEX 231

*This page intentionally left blank.*

# THE RUMSFELD WAY



*This page intentionally left blank.*

## R U M S F E L D ' S   R E T U R N

**AUGUST 9, 1974:** It would be a day like no other in American history. In a one-sentence letter written in the Lincoln Sitting Room in the White House, Richard Nixon resigned the presidency of the United States.

Vice President Gerald Ford, who awoke early that morning, climbed into a limousine for his fateful trip into Washington. Once he had settled in, he was handed a four-page memo outlining the decisions he would need to make soon after being sworn in as America's thirty-eighth president. "We share your view that there should be no chief of staff," the document read in part, reflecting an opinion Ford had expressed previously. "However, there should be someone who could rapidly and efficiently organize the new staff, but who will not be perceived or be eager to be chief of staff."

Ford, well aware of history bearing down upon him, reflected once again upon this critical decision. Unexpectedly, the former congressman found himself presiding over one of the darkest moments in the nation's history. This was not the time for bickering or infighting. Ford knew he needed someone strong enough to ride herd on the situation without appearing overly aggressive or ambitious. His transition team—already in disarray—had recommended Frank Carlucci, the highly regarded former HEW secretary. There were two other alternatives, including

Deputy Defense Secretary William P. Clements, Jr. But as the limo glided over the bridge that separated Virginia from the nation's capital, Ford wrote the name of the man who would be charged with handling one of the most difficult transfers of power in America's history:

## RUMSFELD

Friday, January 11, 2002, the Pentagon, 2:10 P.M. EST: More than eighty reporters have already jockeyed for their plywood seats as nearly a million viewers tune in, awaiting the beginning of the latest best show on earth: the "Rummy Show." At least twice a week, and often more frequently, the sixty-nine-year-old, bespectacled secretary of defense, Donald H. Rumsfeld, has hosted a briefing to deliver the latest news on the war against terrorism. Indisputably, he has become the face and voice of the war. His prickly yet candid answers to often repetitive questions have won over, even mesmerized, a historically skeptical Washington press corps.

In the days before the briefing, there had been disturbing press reports that a certain number of high-ranking Taliban and al Qaeda personnel had been captured and—for reasons yet unknown—released. If this were true, it would represent an embarrassing situation for the U.S. government, which was committed to holding and interrogating any such prisoners. The exchange that followed captures the quintessential Rumsfeld and goes some way toward explaining the unlikely popularity of the Rummy Show:

*Q: Mr. Secretary.... What's your reaction to the release of seven Taliban leaders in Kandahar, and some of them senior?*

*RUMSFELD: I've read those reports and I've tracked them down two days in a row, and we can't verify*



*that that ever happened, that there were ever those people in custody, that anyone—it's hard to be released if you were never in custody.*

Q: *So you're saying it didn't happen?*

RUMSFELD: *I'm not saying it didn't happen.*

Q: *Oh.*

RUMSFELD: *I'm saying precisely what I said.*

Q: *Okay.*

RUMSFELD: *That for two days, I've tried to track down these fascinating stories I've been reading in the press and hearing debated on television, and I am not able to do so....I keep pursuing it and saying, "My goodness. They can't all be wrong. Please see if you can't find what they're writing about." But I can't find what people have been writing about and talking about on television. I can't find it. But this does not say it didn't happen.*

A question or two later, while other reporters are clamoring to be recognized, Rumsfeld thinks of one more thing to add to that discussion, and goes back to it:

Q: *Mr. Secretary—*

Q: *Mr. Secretary—*

RUMSFELD: *Wait a second. If there's anyone in this room who can give me any more information about these people who were supposed to be in custody, whether you've written about it or not—(laughter)—I'll be available after the meeting.*

That's a typical Rumsfeld exchange. The subject could hardly be more serious, yet Rumsfeld attacks it with a hard-nosed humor. And despite his obvious lack of awe for

the media, he has developed a rapport with the press seldom seen in the post-Watergate era. One reason is that he shows them a different kind of respect. He is not afraid to say that he doesn't have every answer. He also announces straight out when he doesn't want to talk about something. And because he is careful not to pass on any information that is not verified, he is generally taken at his word by both the press and the public.

Absent the events of September 11th, the Rumsfeld phenomenon would not have been born, and the Rumsfeld story might never have been written. But in the wake of the terrorist tragedy and Rumsfeld's response to it, the complete Rumsfeld record—a four decade career in private and public life—warranted a thorough examination.

What emerged was a portrait of a *leader*. No, Rumsfeld has not always been “perfect”—far from it—but his record of accomplishment is considerable. And it seemed that the lessons he points us toward, implicitly and explicitly, could be applied in a great variety of situations, both inside and outside of the world of business.

What follows are the leadership lessons learned by a man who twice has been called upon to manage and lead during times of great uncertainty, and who has altered the destiny of the nation in two separate presidential administrations, some three decades apart.

P      A      R      T  

---

O      N      E

# EVOLUTION OF A STATESMAN

*This page intentionally left blank.*

# THE ROAD TO KANDAHAR



*I think he [Rumsfeld] is one of  
the seminal figures of this period.*

—HENRY KISSINGER, FEBRUARY 2002

*All eyes are on the straight-shooting former  
navy pilot who is running the war.*

—NEWSWEEK ON DONALD RUMSFELD





HE HAS BEEN DUBBED “the Articulator in Chief of this perilous effort” by the *Washington Post*, and CNN called him “the media star of America’s new war.” CNN’s Bernard Kalb said, “The press corps had surrendered to Rummy,” despite frustration with the scant amount of information he was providing. Conservative commentator George Will praised to the rooftops his “damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead” approach to the war. Even the boss was taking note. Upon signing the defense appropriations bill early in 2002, President Bush kidded Rumsfeld on his unexpected celebrity. “I always love being introduced by a matinee television idol,” Bush quipped.

And even the *New York Times* commented on Rumsfeld’s celebrity. In a tongue-in-cheek piece in early December 2001, columnist Maureen Dowd declared Rumsfeld to be the ringleader of a new Rat Pack, likening him to the original Rat Pack’s “chairman of the board,” Frank Sinatra: “Forget about Clooney and Pitt mimicking vintage testosterone in the new Rat Pack remake. We’ve got the real deal right here...the suave swagger of Rummy and Cheney enhanced by cluster bombs and secure locations instead of martinis and broads. Who needs the men of “Oceans 11” when you’ve got the men of September 11?”

Not that the new Chairman of the Board is a pub-crawler. Far from it, in fact. Away from the glare of the

briefing or television interview spotlights, and of course excepting official trips, a public Rumsfeld sighting is a rare event indeed. He is seldom seen out on the town, far preferring the quiet and privacy of his Pentagon office, with its windows tinted yellow to deter electronic surveillance.

When he *did* venture out into society in early 2002, it was to attend the Washington premier of *Black Hawk Down*. (This was, apparently, only the second movie Rumsfeld attended in years. The only other was *Saving Private Ryan*.) Judging by the paparazzi who greeted him and the press coverage that followed the event, this was less like a Washington cabinet member venturing out in public and more like an appearance by a movie star.

Even Rumsfeld, who prides himself on his ability to spin scenarios and look into the future, has been caught off guard by his star status. But the lapse is certainly forgivable. In fact, in a culture in which youth and beauty reign supreme, who could have predicted that this unlikely, aging figure—old enough to be the grandfather of some current pop idols—would capture the imagination of the nation. When was the last time *curmudgeonly* was hip?

But the rules that applied to the United States before September 11th no longer pertain. In the wake of the nation's terrible tragedy, Americans looked for someone with gravitas, someone who had a firm hand on the tiller. And as if on cue, there on CNN, dead serious but never self-important, was Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld.

### THE RIGHT MAN AT THE RIGHT TIME

During his first few months on the job, Rumsfeld spent much of his time talking about missile defense and a makeover for the military. Despite the promise of the most



rigorous and far-reaching overhaul of the military in history, however, most Americans took little notice of him. Some in the press—when they paid attention to Rumsfeld at all—depicted him as an aging politician out of touch with the new ways of Washington. Others saw him as an ultra-conservative “Darth Vader” type who would pursue missile and space defense at the expense of other more pressing programs. By early September, there were even murmurs of an “early exit” for “Rummy” (including a September 7th *Washington Post* story that speculated about who might replace him).

But from the first moments following the attacks, Rumsfeld emerged as a compelling figure. Flanked by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Hugh Shelton (as well as two U.S. senators), in a building that was still burning, Rumsfeld struck a note of grief, calm, and purpose. “This is a tragic day for our country,” he said. “Our hearts and prayers go to the injured, their families, and friends. We have taken a series of measures to prevent further attacks and to determine who is responsible. We’re making every effort to take care of the injured and the casualties in the building.”

The Bush administration made a particular point of stressing *continuity* amid seeming chaos. “The United States government is functioning in the face of this terrible act against our country,” Rumsfeld said. “I should add that the briefing here is taking place in the Pentagon. The Pentagon’s functioning. It will be in business tomorrow.”

By the following day, the government was moving from reaction to action, and Rumsfeld played his part in this transition. He subtly de-emphasized damage assessment and began outlining the Bush administration’s plan for moving forward. He introduced Americans to the concept of “a new twenty-first-century battlefield.” By all accounts,

he excelled in the immediate wake of the attacks, emerging as a cantankerous but capable leader at a point when America badly needed direction.

What struck many observers most forcefully was Rumsfeld's acid-tongued candor. Truth-telling, especially with a hard edge, seems strangely out of place when it emerges from the defense establishment. We have become all too accustomed to our military brass (and their civilian counterparts) describing war in euphemisms and sanitized phrases. By departing so forcefully from that tradition, Rumsfeld has etched himself a sharp profile in our minds. Yes, he's sometimes prickly and acerbic, but he's also oddly refreshing and reassuring.

Rumsfeld finds himself in the final act of a four-decade-long career. Today, he appears to have no qualms about setting an errant journalist straight. If he doesn't know something, he doesn't hesitate to say so. If he doesn't want to answer a certain question, he says that too: "Those aren't the kinds of things one discusses," or "It's not the time for discussions like that." And on the flip side, he may choose to respond to a question with an almost alarming directness. At one press conference, Rumsfeld was asked why U.S. warplanes were bombing in a certain area. "To kill them [al Qaeda and Taliban fighters]," he replied. In another meeting with the press, he used the word "kill" nine times—probably an all-time record for a Pentagon press briefing. As the *Economist* put it, "Mr. Rumsfeld's waffle quotient is remarkably low: he either speaks straightforwardly, or not at all."

So he possesses the gift of candor—a no-nonsense directness so notable that it achieved the pop-culture status of getting spoofed on "Saturday Night Live" in late 2001. At the same time, he draws upon a store of earthy, pungent images and metaphors, often with quirky or colorful

expressions. The result can be striking. When asked if the United States was close to apprehending fugitive terrorists in Afghanistan (Osama bin Laden), he replied, “If you’re chasing a chicken around the barnyard, are you close or are you not close until you get him?”

Journalist and pundit Walter Lippmann observed the ways of power in Washington for many years. “Successful politicians are insecure and intimidated men, who advance politically only as they placate, appease, bribe, seduce, bamboozle, or otherwise manage to manipulate the news,” he once observed. “Politics has become one of our most neglected, our most abused, and our most ignored professions.”

Most modern administrations have only compounded the problem. The Johnson administration obfuscated its way through Vietnam. (“Why should Ho Chi Minh believe me,” Johnson complained, “when the newspapers and broadcasters in my own country won’t believe me?”) Richard Nixon was elected in part because he had a “secret plan” to end the Vietnam War—which he turned out not to have—and eventually got caught in his own Watergate snares.

Gerald Ford pardoned Nixon, and never recovered from that act. Jimmy Carter was squeaky clean but deemed ineffective. Even Ronald Reagan—the so-called Teflon president—was held accountable for the Iran-Contra scandal. The first George Bush was punished for flip-flopping on a tax increase—and Bill Clinton, of course, wounded himself mortally with the Lewinsky affair.

In the early days of 2002, it is apparent that people trust President Bush, Vice President Richard B. Cheney, and Secretary of State Colin Powell. For the first time in decades, in fact, a broad cross section of America has confidence in its leaders. Most Americans today would not agree with journalist Lippmann’s assessment that politicians advance as they “bamboozle” or “manipulate the news.” Polls taken

since the September 11th attacks suggest that more than two-thirds of Americans trust their government, a figure not approached since America's victory in the Gulf War.

And Donald Rumsfeld is one of the reasons for this important sea change. In the days and weeks following September 11th, it became increasingly clear that Donald Rumsfeld was the right man in the right job at the right time. Those close to him insist that he hasn't changed. Perhaps he hasn't—but the world clearly has. And in the new world that emerged in the wake of September 11th, a long-time master of the Washington power game finally found himself in circumstances that would catapult him onto the world stage, like no other event in his already distinguished career.

The secretary of defense's own words, delivered to members of the U.S. Armed Forces twenty-four hours after the attack, suggest that he, too, felt that he was ready for the challenge. By invoking the words of Churchill to the U.S. Armed Forces, Rumsfeld was, in essence, throwing down the gauntlet, asking the men and women in the service to rise to the occasion as their predecessors had in World War II:

*Great crises are marked by their memorable moments. At the height of peril to his own nation, Winston Churchill spoke of their finest hour. Yesterday, America and the cause of human freedom came under attack, and the great crisis of America's twenty-first century was suddenly upon us.*

Some might have blinked at the approach of the hand of destiny. Rumsfeld did not. What explains his "state of readiness" in the post-September 11th world? First, his many years of maneuvering in the minefields of Washington politics had rendered him one of Washington's

most experienced political infighters. But just as important, Rumsfeld had unparalleled experience managing complex situations in times of national crisis and uncertainty. The most vivid example of this was Rumsfeld's management of the post-Watergate Ford White House, at a time when the executive branch found itself in a state of turmoil, even chaos.

### MANAGING UNDER FIRE

Days prior to Nixon's resignation, the *Washington Post* ran a story entitled "A Capital in Agony." That headline summed up the feelings of a dazed electorate, who had watched the unfortunate events of Watergate play out over many months. In two centuries of American history, no sitting president had been forced from office except at the ballot box. Now the nation was embarking on uncharted waters, and it was indeed a time of "agony"—not just for Washington, but for the American people.

While the aftermaths of Watergate and September 11th were enormously different, there are some obvious parallels as well. Both crises created great uncertainty—a sense that the nation was at great risk if it stood still and yet had no clear path forward. In the wake of Nixon's resignation, Americans felt that their political process, even their democracy, had been violated. It was no accident that Gerald Ford titled his memoir *A Time to Heal*.

The tragic events of September 11th, too, created a sense of violation. Beyond inflicting staggering costs and catastrophic loss of life in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania, the attacks cast a deep shadow on the national spirit. Most Americans felt that the enemy "was among us" and feared other attacks were imminent. The majority of Americans suddenly felt unsafe doing things

that they had done routinely for decades, such as flying on commercial aircraft and working in tall buildings. It seemed impossible that normalcy could be restored, that Americans could ever feel as safe as they had prior to September 11th, or that they would ever again enjoy the luxury of doing “business as usual.”

While the entire Bush team rose to this great challenge (e.g., Dick Cheney and Colin Powell), it was Donald Rumsfeld who had the unique role of reassuring the American people and keeping the nation informed on the progress of the war against terrorism. Although there were other seasoned and articulate cabinet members whom Bush could have selected for this critical role—both Secretary of State Powell and Vice President Cheney had served as highly effective spokespeople during Desert Storm, for example—Rumsfeld was designated the voice of the war, and the voice of reassurance, by the Bush administration.

There is one more unavoidable parallel between Watergate and September 11th. In recent years, national crises have become a collective experience shared in real time, mainly through the ubiquitous presence of TV. “We’re all Watergate junkies,” one observer confessed during that time of crisis. “Some of us are mainlining, some are sniffing...but we are all addicted.” The same could be said for September 11th and the war on terrorism, only this time the addiction was even more widespread. In the intervening quarter-century, cable television had insinuated itself into America’s living rooms and bedrooms. (By 2000, more than 80 percent of American households were either cable or satellite subscribers.) This meant that twenty-four-hour-a-day news services like MSNBC were available to satisfy our cravings for the latest news from Afghanistan (CNN even aired a weeknight show entitled “Live from Afghanistan”).

And for the most part, it was Rumsfeld that CNN and its competitors served up to us, day after day. Not surprisingly, millions of Americans were soon asking the obvious questions: *Who is this Donald Rumsfeld? And where on earth did he come from?*

*This page intentionally left blank.*





# Professional



## Want to learn more?

We hope you enjoy this McGraw-Hill eBook! If you'd like more information about this book, its author, or related books and websites, please [click here](#).



We're sorry, but this material  
is not available in this excerpt.  
If you want more information  
about this book or would like to purchase it,  
please [click here](#).